



LES EXCOMMUNIÉS.

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THE EXCOMMUNICATED.

AN EPISODE

IN THE

HISTORY OF CANADA.

LES EXCOMMUNIÉS.

Voyez-vous, sur le bord de ce chemin bourbeux,
Cet enclos en ruine où broutent les grands bœufs ?
Ici, cinq paysans—trois hommes et deux femmes—
Eurent la sépulture ignoble des infâmes !

Cette histoire est bien triste, et date de bien loin.

Comme un soldat mourant la carabine au poing,
Québec était tombé. Sans honte et sans mystère,
Un Bourbon nous avait livrés à l'Angleterre !

Ce fut un coup mortel, un long déchirement,
Quand ce peuple entendit avec effarement,
—Lui qui tenait enfin la victoire suprême,—
Par un nouveau forfait souillant son diadème,
Le roi de France dire aux Saxons : Prenez-les !
Ma gloire n'en a plus besoin ; qu'ils soient Anglais !

O Lorraine ! ô Strasbourg ! si belles et si grandes,
Vous, c'est le sort au moins qui vous fit allemandes !

Des bords du Saint-Laurent, scène de tant d'exploits,
On entendit alors soixante mille voix
Jeter au ciel ce cri d'amour et de souffrance :
—Eh bien, soit ! nous serons français malgré la France !

Or chacun a tenu sa parole. Aujourd'hui,
Sur ce lâche abandon plus de cent ans ont lui ;
Et, sous le sceptre anglais, cette fière phalange
Conserve encore aux yeux de tous, et sans mélange,
Son culte pour la France, et son cachet sacré.

Mais d'autres, repoussant tout servage exécré,
Après avoir brûlé leur dernière cartouche,
Renfermés désormais dans un orgueil farouche,

THE EXCOMMUNICATED.

In yon rough plot beside the muddy road,
Where on wild herbage heavy cattle browse,
Five peasants lie—two women and three men—
Whose burial rites were such as felons have.

The tale is old and dates from long ago.

Like soldier dying with his arms in hand,
Quebec had fallen. Without disguise or shame,
A Bourbon sold us to our English foes!

Mortal the blow and long the agony
Felt when our people heard with wild dismay,—
—They who had gained the last great victory,—
The King of France—(soiling with new disgrace
His diadem)—say to the Saxon,—Take them!
My glory needs them not; let them be English!

O Strasbourg! O Lorraine, so fair so great,
'Twas fate at least that made you German land!

Along St. Lawrence, scene of gallant deeds,
The voice of sixty thousand souls was heard
Raising to Heaven their cry of love and grief;
—So be it! We'll be French despite of France!

And each has kept his word. And now to day,
A century since this base abandonment,
And under English rule, this faithful band,
Still cherish openly and unalloyed,
Their sacred love for France, and her impress.

But some who spurned all hateful servitude,—
When their last cartridge had been spent in vain,
Nursing their wrath in gloomy, savage pride,

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Impotent rebels, without fear or shame,—
Determined, free and in the face of death,
To carry to the grave their deathless hate.

And vainly was the power of Rome invoked;
And vainly in her simple followers' ears,
The priest read out the fearful catalogue
Of pains reserved by God for stubborn souls;
In vain exhausted all its awful threats;
Nor threatenings nor sermons aught availed!
No! said the vanquished; we are Frenchmen still,
No man has power to set us up for sale!

At length the thunder from the pulpit came:
The Church to force her children to obey,
Struck with regret, but calmly resolute.

Five only braved the blow;—but these resembled
In their proud folly, the unshaken rock;
They let the thunder growl above their heads,
And in despite of insult and of fears,
Sublimely mad, in holy ignorance,
Refused to bow to any God but France!

Old age crept on them,—death came in its turn,—
And without priest, or cross, in that rough plot,
Close by the muddy road, where cattle browse
These stubborn souls lay down in turn to sleep.

One yet remained, a broken-down old man,
A shadow; five and twenty years had passed
Since on his head the anathema had fallen.
Bowed on his trembling staff, with whited lip,
On the deserted road he oft was seen
At twilight, wandering in the rain and storm,
Spectre-like,—turning oft his eyes away,
To shun the child that pelted him with stones,

Il s'enfonçait tout seul dans les ombres du soir,
Et plus d'un affirmait avoir eu l'entrevoir
— Les femmes du canton s'en signaient interdites —
Agenouillé la nuit sur les tombes maudites.

Un jour on l'y trouva roide et gelé.

Sa main
Avait laissé tomber sur le bord du chemin
Un vieux fusil rouillé, son arme de naguère,
Son ami des grand jours, son compagnon de guerre,
Son dernier camarade et son suprême espoir.

On creusa de nouveau dans le sol dur et noir ;
Et l'on mit côte à côte, en la fosse nouvelle,
Le vieux mousquet français avec le vieux rebelle !

Le peuple a conservé ce sombre souvenir.
Et lorsque du couchant l'or commence à brunir, —
Au village de Saint Michel de Bellechasse,
Le passant, attardé par la pêche ou la chasse,
Craignant de voir surgir quelque fantôme blanc,
Du fatal carrefour se détourne en tremblant.

Done, ces cinq paysans n'eurent pour sépulture
Qu'un tertre où l'animal vient chercher sa pâture !
Ils le méritaient, soit ! Mais on dira partout
Qu'ils furent bel et bien cinq héros après tout !

Je respecte l'arrêt qui les frappa, sans doute ;
Mais, lorsque le hasard me met sur cette route ;
Sans demander à Dieu si j'ai tort en cela,
Je découvre mon front devant ces tombes là !

LOUIS FRÉCHETTE.

He plunged alone into the shades of night.
And more than one affirmed to having seen him,
—The village women crossed themselves in fright—
Kneeling in darkness by the unblessed graves.

One day they found him frozen stiff; his hand
Had in its weakness on the road let fall
An ancient rusted gun,—his old-time weapon,
His friend in the brave days,—his war companion,
His latest comrade and his supreme hope.

They dug into the black and hardened soil,
And laid in that new grave, and side by side,
The old French musket and the old-time rebel.

The people cherish yet this sad remembrance ;
And when the sunset gold fades into grey,
The passer through St. Michel de Bellechasse,
Belated at his sport with rod or gun,
Fearing to see some sheeted spectre rise,
Turns trembling from the fatal spot away.

So these five peasants had for burial place,
Five little mounds where cattle seek their food !
Deserved it,—yes—perhaps ! Yet men will say
They were in truth five heroes after all !

I bow, no doubt, to the decree that struck them,
Yet, when by chance I pass along that road,
—Not asking God if I be right or wrong—
I pause—uncovered—near those lowly graves !

G. W. WICKSTEED.